

LEARNING SKILLS AND THE TRIVIUM

BY JARETT SANCHEZ

QUICK START GUIDE:

IF YOU'RE LOOKING TO JUMP INTO THE TRIVIUM METHOD RIGHT AWAY, YOU CAN SKIP MOST OF THE INTRODUCTORY REMARKS AND READ THE SHORT DESCRIPTIONS ON PAGES 17-18, THEN GO TO THE SKILLS SECTION ON PAGE 22.

PART I

THE BEGINNING

INTRODUCTION

I believe that our education system is broken, and that if given the tools of learning, anyone can get a high quality education in a Do-It-Yourself manner without attending any college, or even high school. What you'll read here is not found in any public school, and even though some homeschoolers have a certain version of it, they've never known it in this way. Nobody has, until now. This is a beginner's guide to the liberal arts, known as the Trivium, which focuses on the *practical skills* instead of the academic subjects. It does not provide a curriculum of any kind. It also does not go into great depth on any of the three Trivium subjects—you will need textbooks and/or audio courses for that, there is no way around it. But where it lacks in complete detail and ready-made lesson plans, it makes up for in broad strokes and dependable outlines. You can get yourself started with just this essay and a little creativity.

This essay focuses on **study skills**. I prefer to call them “learning skills” because I studied a lot in school but I didn't learn very much. I certainly didn't learn that I could approach the learning of *any* subject in almost the exact same way. And I certainly didn't learn that I could educate myself, to a very high degree, without going to college. Most of what I learned in school was memorized in the short-term in order to complete homework assignments and pass the tests. I had to jump through hoops—no real learning was required. Just enough memorization and understanding to fill in some blanks. Do you remember Algebra 2 or Chemistry still? Ten points if you do.

Once upon a time in the United States, there was a thing called the one-room school house, or Dame school, and it was unique because it put students of all ages in a large room together with a teacher acting as facilitator. She would provide basic instruction but as the older students learned the material, they would help teach the younger students. While it wasn't a perfect system, that attitude of more experienced students helping newer students to learn runs through this entire essay. It wasn't until Horace Mann introduced the Prussian model of education to the U.S. that students were broken up into age groups and given lectures instead of hands-on instruction. The basic

pattern set by Mann lingers with us to this day. The Prussian model of education was designed to make the population of Prussia docile and subservient to the will of the king. This is antithetical to the liberal attitude toward education (or the liberal attitude in general). It's amazing how little we are taught about Horace Mann, considering the impact he had on education. I do not propose a plan to introduce the Trivium into modern schooling, but I do think it worth raising the question, "Is school completely necessary anymore?" If you find a study partner either in person or online, the whole learning process becomes social. I want you to work with others whenever you can.

In this essay I provide you with over twenty study skills, many of which can be used right away. This is unique in the field of the Trivium because most people require you to learn entire subjects in order to start using this method—I don't. You should still study those subjects in full but not everyone is committed to that level of study right away. People want to get into the method but they don't know where to start, and they're not ready to jump into the deep end first. What they need is a helping hand to show them a few moves before they swim off on their own, and this essay is that helping hand.

In his book, *A Student's Guide to Liberal Learning*, James V. Schall, S.J. writes:

"The learning that is here described is called "liberal," that is, freeing. It takes a lot of work to be free. Yet, we need some way to become what we are. No one can do this for us, but we cannot do it merely by ourselves either. We need guides to find guides. Something that Aristotle once said should be reiterated here; namely, that many people who do not know books are nevertheless very wise, often wiser than the so-called learned. Perhaps it will be our grandfather or an ordinary farmer or worker. We should look for and respect the experience of ordinary people. Wherever there is a mind and reality, someone can find the truth. This in no way lessens our drive to know more completely and to seek the guidance of good books, good teachers, good parents, good libraries, good friends."

This essay is a guide to find guides. It cuts right to the heart of the matter: *how do I apply the Trivium Method today?* There is enough information here to give you some understanding of the whole territory. I've provided you with a very good map. Don't think that I'm taking all of the hard work out of this. I'm not making the journey for you. If you want to get anything out of this instruction, you have to put in the hard work. **The point is to learn how to become self-taught.**

Another point I'd like to comment on from that quote above is the concept of this education being "freeing." The word liberal itself means, "*befitting a free person*," and this is an important distinction since history is full of stories about the mass

of people being in one form of slavery or another. Ancient Rome built its society on slavery, with the free citizens being the ones that received the liberal education. Nowadays people talk about being "**wage slaves**," just capable enough to hold jobs that barely pay the bills, but never able to rise above their low economic conditions and live with some modest wealth. **Debt slave** is another one I've seen before. Debt slave holds especially true for the millions of college students that got college loans thinking that they would be able to pay them off easily, only to graduate into a slow job market with enough debt to buy a small home with. Where's the freedom in that? The irony is, most colleges bill themselves as *liberal* arts schools. There's something inherently wrong in that. An education that keeps you enslaved economically is not one that frees you. I call bullshit.

SCHOOL IS NOT AN
EDUCATION.
EDUCATION BEGINS
WHEN SCHOOL ENDS.

--MORTIMER J ADLER

I am not an academic or someone that is trying to write for academics. A few years ago I found out about the Trivium and decided it was worth learning. In some of my spare time over the years I've begun collecting my thoughts on this method and ways to present it better. By being in touch with other people looking into the same thing I

realized that there was a lack of beginner's material out there. So I decided it was best to focus on writing something for the average, everyday person that happen to stumble upon this path. Every once in a while a bookworm takes to this material like a fish to water, but mostly I just see some curious people looking around and kind of scratching their heads. It's not surprising, the idea of starting out by learning Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric is a bit daunting. Most of us need a handy guide before getting into the heavy stuff. Not a long list of study materials.

Since I'm writing for a wide audience you won't find any citations, there will probably be some grammatical errors, loose language, and even false assertions, and I'm going to assume that you will follow up this essay with research of your own. My mission is not to write at the level of the professor, but at the level of the person next door. Whether or not I accomplish this task only time, *and a few honest emails*, will tell. Consider this essay a citizen's project, a layman's effort, and not a professional work. I will work towards writing things at the academic level in the future but for now we need something a little simpler.

The best way to use this guide is to read it over once or twice, making notes as you go along. After getting familiar with the whole piece and the basic concepts, take a few skills and *use them right away*. It's really not even studying that you're doing, it's practice. Put in half an hour each night, or a couple hours on the weekend. I want you to get some practice with the skills before deciding whether or not to go further with these studies. If I do my job well in explaining things to you, and you do your job well in applying what you've learned, then after some time you will be ready to tackle any subject you want to learn on your own.

MAY THIS GUIDE SERVE YOU WELL

J. SANCHEZ

MAY 21, 2014

“ . . . ”

---*Anonymous*

They say it's best to start a piece of writing with a good quote. I seem to have misplaced the one quote that I wanted to start this essay with, so you'll have to excuse me as I'm still an amateur in the field of educational writing. If I would have found the quote that I had meant to show you, you would probably have some sense of interest in the words that follow, and most likely because the quote had something to do with solving difficult problems easily, or the truth that every man and woman is a genius, whether they know it or not.

Had you read that quote you might be thinking that there's something in this writing that you're looking for—maybe a simple answer, a shortcut, a key. *If only I could find that quote!!!* To be honest, I'm not even sure if the quote was attributed to the right person or not. You know how the Internet is, so full of misinformation and false attributions; it could have been Henry Ford that was quoted but Abe Lincoln that said it! Ahh! So much for the big opener. . .

Can we just assume that you read the quote? That you feel some sort of inspiration or expectation of enlightenment? And that you're ready to follow these words wherever they lead. . .?

Ok, good.

I want to go into new territory with you.

New places that offer special rewards--

valuable treasures recognized in every land.

It was in late 2009 that I first discovered the educational paradigm of the Trivium, and since that time I have spent numerous unpaid hours digging and researching and uncovering many artifacts of this amazing learning path. What I've found continues to amaze me. I was looking for a way to improve my mind and to “get smart,” without having to get a college degree, but I had no idea just how much I would uncover in my investigation.

There have been those that believed the Trivium should be kept to an elite few, with an emphasis on class division and corporate leadership, and also those that believe it should be taught with an emphasis on religious authority. But I didn't spend countless hours reading through endless texts on ancient pedagogical methods just to be told that you're not rich enough, or obedient enough, to receive the teachings.

Some of the texts that I have read were so dry they should have been handed out with a glass of water. Despite the chore of absorbing so much material and having no idea where my studies would lead to, I carried on. Whenever I wanted to give up, my intuition told me that the reward would be worth the effort. My intuition served me well, and the rewards have been greater than all the hard work. A new world opened up to me. A new relationship with my mind emerged. I learned that I could conquer any challenge and learn any subject or skill, regardless of the difficulty or how smart or stupid I thought I was. I discovered a secret of the ancients, possessed by so many of history's greatest minds, and I should hold this back from you?

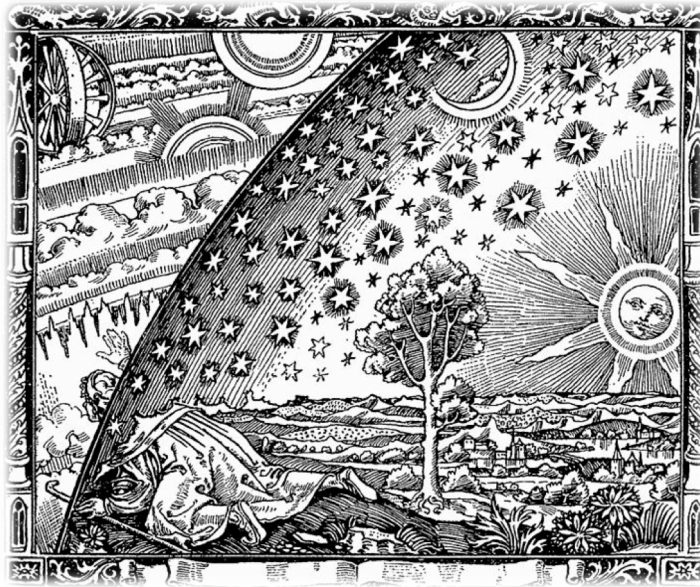
I say: Can't we bend the rules a bit? Just this once. . .?

YES WE CAN

Whoever you are that is reading this, you most likely arrived here in search of something you have heard about. Either from a podcast interview, a YouTube video, or a random book find at Barnes & Noble, something made you curious enough to bring you here. Maybe it was talked about as some sort of secret trick that makes you smarter than everyone else, or an educational model that is the best one in the whole world, giving you a Harvard education in the comfort of your own home. Or maybe, just maybe, you're like I was and you felt that there's something deeper to this subject than a short interview or video could possibly cover, and you want to know more.

Whatever your reason is, you're here to learn.

More specifically, you're here to learn *how to learn*.



When I first found out about the Trivium, my mind was a mess. My thoughts had become disorganized and chaotic, causing my memory to become deficient and my thought processes to be sluggish. Memory recall atrophied, vocabulary dwindled, and to use the language of computers my “processing speed” had become greatly reduced. I grew up always being one of the “smart kids” in school, known for acing tests with little study, and there I was, unable to maintain focus long enough to read a challenging book, or easily forgetting what I was saying in conversations, and noticing a stark reduction in my ability to problem solve. How did this happen?

I can trace it back to one specific day in high school.

While many of my friends in high school enjoyed skipping class to go fulfill their hedonistic impulses, one day I decided to do something a little different: I was going to sneak into the school library. As dorky as that sounds, I had a real purpose. My teacher for Senior honors English had us reading a fictional book in which the character, an above-average intellectual teenager, ended up reading through the works of Thomas Aquinas. There were few in my graduating class that enjoyed words as much as I did, and so reading about this teenaged character tackling some of the most complicated and well-written books in history was inspiring. I'd always felt that I should be reading the “Great Books” but didn't really know where and how to start. So I decided to ditch class one day and sneak my way into the library (you needed a “pass” signed by a teacher to be in the library). Heading to a table near the reference section, I picked out a few titles from the Great Books of the Western World series produced by Hutchins and Adler. Plato, Aquinas, and Descartes, I believe, were the ones that I picked. For the better part of a few class periods I sat in front of those books, looking deeply into them and trying to comprehend what I read there. By the end of it, not only did I have a headache but I had come to two conclusions:

1. I did NOT understand what I was reading and thought that it was way beyond my reading level, and even if I WERE to read any of those books well enough to understand what was written there, I realized that it would take me about an entire year at the rate I was going.
2. Even if I took up the task and plowed through one of Plato's books for six months, I'd still have dozens more books to get through, of the same difficulty level, before I could even say I was "educated."

Needless to say, I was crushed. There I was, at the edge of my peer group, too smart to play dumb and too dumb to play smart. I was caught in a no-man's-land of the mind; I gave up. From that day on I had no real interest in pursuing the intellectual potential within me. It just didn't seem worth working two or three decades just to feel like I'd arrived somewhere that most people have no interest in anyway. It was ten years later and a lot of mental degeneration before I decided that enough was enough, and I began to take responsibility for my mind. No later than a week after I'd set this intention within myself, I came across the Trivium.

In October of 2009, I listened to a podcast episode on the subject of the Trivium, in which the guest began to lay out the fundamentals of what is now known as the Trivium Method. The interview (put into three parts) covered a wide variety of subjects relevant to the show, but the over-arching theme seemed to be: there is a better way to educate yourself, it's not widely known about but it has historical roots, *and it is there for your discovery*. Immediately I intuited that whatever this Trivium thing was, it was just what I was looking for.

A week before, when I had set my intention to clean up the attic of my mind, I had planned to use a particular method of reading that I had come across once somewhere on the internet. The method went something like this: read a book, one chapter at a time, and before continuing on to the next chapter, review in reverse the chapter(s) you have already read. So after reading chapter one you review it and make sure you understand the main points, then you read chapter two. Before reading chapter three you review chapter two, then chapter one, and so on like this until you've finished the book. Not a bad way to really get to understand something. I was content to stick with that method, and still to this day find it a solid, simple approach to reading, but something in the Trivium material made me consider expanding my studies into this new field called the Liberal Arts and Sciences.

The Liberal Arts and Sciences are a grouping of seven subjects: The Trivium, consisting of the three subjects Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric, and the Quadrivium, consisting of the four subjects of Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy. The Trivium (Arts) deal with the Mind, and the Quadrivium (Sciences) with Matter. This group of seven subjects, as well as numerous variations containing more or less subjects, has origins in Ancient Hindu and Greek cultures, and it was revived in the Roman era, and once again during the Middle Ages, each time forming in a way peculiar to the time and place.

Not only was the Trivium presented as a historical grouping of subjects, it was an actual *method for learning* called, the **Integrated Trivium**.

The Integrated Trivium incorporates all of the knowledge of the three subjects and combines them with a three-part metaphor for the learning process in which Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric (*in that order*) symbolize the natural mental processes of *absorbing* information, *organizing* information, and *communicating* information.

Qui docet, discit

He who teaches, learns.

--Joseph Lancaster

The theory goes that the three Trivium subjects emerged as a result of our minds handling information in this way. Just as we learn the basics of a language through exposure to General Grammar, when we absorb new information about a subject, skill, or situation, we start to form in our minds the “grammar.” Just as we learn to discern between truth and falsehood in Formal Logic, we obtain the “logic” of something as we begin making sense of the incoming data and connect it with other previous knowledge. And just as we learn the persuasive arts in Classical Rhetoric-- those skills necessary to communicate to an audience or listener effectively-- we grasp the “rhetoric” of a thing when we are able to discuss it and even teach it to someone else. While the literal subjects emerged as a result of this three-part mental process, the skills they provide actually enhance and support the process, creating a dynamic relationship between skills and method.

While I didn't have an immediate grasp of the subject, I did have confidence that if I just applied myself to learning this approach, to learning these subjects and this method, then all of my intellectual troubles could be dealt with and I could plumb the depths of my mental potential without being intimidated or giving up. I was right to have such confidence. I *did* find what I was looking for-- that thing that I always knew existed, even though I never knew what it was.

Imagine something for a moment: You're sitting at the computer writing a paper for class, or an email to a friend, or even a funny Facebook update. Once you know what it is you want to say, your fingers hit the keys, and those keys signal little electronic impulses that get sent into the computer. This is your **Grammar**.

Next, those electronic impulses make their way into the computer processor where it is made sense of. All of those ones and zeros are translated and organized. Basically, your computer "figures out" what it is supposed to do. This is your **Logic**.

Then, your computer displays on the screen the appropriate symbols given the specific keys you hit. All of those ones and zeros become numbers and letters. Sentences begin forming on the page. Your ideas, in the form of information, went through a process of encoding and decoding, transferring the knowledge from one place (your mind) to another (the computer screen). This is your **Rhetoric**.

Another way to say it is that this is your Input, Processing, and Output. The computer analogy demonstrates the very basic idea behind the Trivium Method. While our minds are not linear like a computer processor, we go through similar functions of manipulating information and re-communicating what we know. I first encountered this notion of a three-part process in Antero Alli's book *Angel Tech*, in which he describes the three functions of Intelligence as being to **Absorb**, **Organize**, and **Communicate**. I find those terms more suitable to the functions of the mind than computer terms, so I will continue to use them primarily throughout this text. But anywhere you see those terms written they could be replaced with any other of these sets terms:

GRAMMAR, LOGIC, RHETORIC

INPUT, PROCESSING, OUTPUT

KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING, WISDOM

REFUTATION

Before going on to the meaty part of this essay which covers the Trivium skills, I want to address some disagreements with liberal arts education that have been raised over the past few years. Essentially I can boil down these arguments into three categories: Elitist, Religious, and Snobbish.

The Elitist argument goes something like this: a proper liberal education should only be left in the hands of people that come from a certain social and economic background, facilitating the distinction between a type of “managerial class” and a “worker's class.” Numerous historical documents show that this is true. While I have not spent much time researching this aspect of the Trivium, a simple internet search will provide leads for the curious.

There is no moral code that is guaranteed with the Trivium. By keeping this education in the hands of the elites and away from the common folk, a great treasure has been deprived from the very people that need to be uplifted by it the mos. What is left out of education is sometimes more important than what is included! Even providing “the People” with some parts of a liberal education is not enough, for what good is a citizenry that can reason well and use poetic language but that cannot engage in civic duties effectively? Providing the semblance of education without the tools of social construction gives one only the illusion of education.

ALL EDUCATION IS POLITICAL

The Religious argument is not so much against people obtaining a liberal arts education, it is against people obtaining it outside of the realm of religious authority.

Even Dorothy Sayers, author of the essay *The Lost Tools of Learning* and someone I've taken many great ideas from, described the Trivium best as being subordinate to Theology. Another argument that usually comes from the religious camp is that the Trivium leads away from the Spiritual and towards the Materialistic, when not guided by theological or spiritual doctrine.

Never have I had any issue with someone holding their faith dearly, but what I do disagree with is that this education should be kept within the realm of faith. Primarily I think this way because ***not everyone holds the same beliefs***. I rarely discuss my own spiritual and religious beliefs in public, but I do know for sure that I cannot honestly tell someone else that theirs is wrong and mine is right. It just can't be done in good conscience. The whole structure of religion is based first upon an understanding of faith, and from there you can deduce all sorts of religious logic-- *which is only valid based upon its own premises of faith*. And to go even further, some people hold no religious or spiritual belief whatsoever and decide instead to base their understandings on empirical and/or measurable evidence. To base logical conclusions upon premises of evidence and premises of faith are two completely different modes of knowledge, and so much disagreement and upset comes from people's inability to realize this fact.

The other argument, that the Trivium unhinged from a spiritual dogma will lead to materialism, is not necessarily true. For those that choose to believe only in the material, it is only a moment of faith that can change their mind. For someone that chooses to believe in something beyond the physical, the Trivium does not preclude one from doing so. The Trivium aids the student in discerning truth from falsehood, and however it is applied is up to the student entirely. There are no guarantees of ultimate Truth here, is what I'm saying. To each their own but, be better for the world by your studies, I say.

TO EACH THEIR OWN

The Snobbish argument is a bit of a tongue-in-cheek term. By this I mean that there are those who say that either the Trivium (and by extension the Quadrivium) are not a complete enough education for an individual, or that the Trivium only supplies one with an aesthetic appreciation of the Arts and Literature and little more than that. I agree on the first point and disagree on the second.

The Trivium is certainly not a complete education for an individual. What it provides the intellectual muscle so highly needed in society, but it does nothing for the emotional and physical education of that individual. To address this discrepancy I've included some sections on emotional and physical development as necessary components of a well-rounded education. The Trivium does provide a full set of critical thinking tools, and this provides you with the ability to discern fact from fallacy.

The appreciation of art in it's various forms is a gift awarded to our species alone, and it is true that the study of the liberal arts, in particular, will expose a person to this deep aspect of culture. To say that this gift is the only reward of the liberal arts is to miss what is most valuable about them. These Arts provide the student/seeker with the freedom to be comfortable in the face of Uncertainty. The courage to navigate the chaos of the Unknown. To question that which is often accepted without thought. The ability to find one's bearings in all situations and, hopefully, develop a sense of what is "Right Action" in each moment. In this way, we can speak of these as the ***Liberating Arts***.

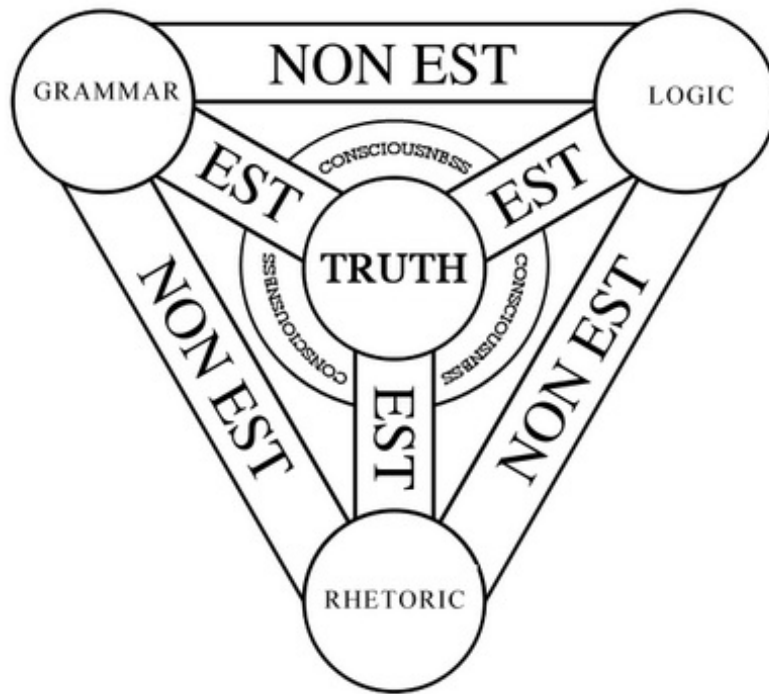
The Trivium method provides one with critical thinking skills as well as learning and study skills—life skills. This is about uplifting your mind and improving not only the world inside of you, but the world around you as well.

THE TOOLS OF LEARNING HAVE BEEN FOUND

Part II: The Skills

NOW WE GET INTO THE MAJOR PORTION OF THIS ESSAY, THE ONE YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR. THIS IS THE PART WHERE YOU ARE GIVEN THE KEYS TO THE TRIVIUM IN A WAY THAT HAS NEVER BEEN DONE BEFORE. *THIS IS SOMETHING NEW.* EVERY GENERATION INTERPRETS THE ARTS DIFFERENTLY. WHAT FOLLOWS IS THE TRIVIUM AS SEEN THROUGH A 21ST CENTURY MIND.

THIS IS THE NEXT STEP.



GRAMMAR

ABSORB. This is where it all begins. You're absorbing as much information as you can about a subject, a skill, or a situation. Get familiar. Don't try to understand everything. Just become familiar with what you encounter. Form new maps. Universal outlines emerge. You begin to detect patterns. See a bigger picture. Here you encounter the raw material that your mind uses to construct an Understanding. Be discerning in your choice of materials.

1. DECONSTRUCT
2. TAKE NOTES/ANNOTATE
3. SPACED REPETITION
4. DISCOVER THE HISTORY
5. DISTINGUISH MATERIALS
6. SELECTION
7. CONCENTRATION

LOGIC

ORGANIZE. This is where things get un-messy. You have a wealth of information, now sort through it all. Make sense. Eliminate contradictions. New words jump out at you, asking for definition. Bring Order to Chaos. Light to the Darkness. Most of your time will be spent here. Logic is based on premises which lead to conclusions. Conclusions lead to either certainty or probability. You have to have a *reason* for accepting a conclusion. False premises breed false conclusions. Be careful. Learn to detect BS. Question everything, nothing is off-limits.

8. WINNOWING
9. FIND THE ARGUMENT
10. DEFINE TERMS
11. REASONING: DEDUCTIVE & INDUCTIVE
12. SPOT THE FALLACIES
13. NOTICE STRUCTURE
14. COMPARE EXPECTATIONS TO EXPERIENCE
15. MORE & FURTHER

RHETORIC

COMMUNICATE. Rhetoric *is* communication. Aristotle called it the available means of persuasion. Almost everything we communicate, we want to be believed. We want to persuade. To entertain. To instruct. The best way to learn is to teach. It's not enough to simply understand. We've created a structure, and now we've got to deliver it. Even a single word or a gesture can communicate meaning. Everything around us is context. Who are we speaking to? We must choose our words wisely. Always be on the look out for the right words at the right moment.

16. PARAPHRASE

17. THE RHETORICAL TRIANGLE

18. FIVE CANONS OF RHETORIC

19. TOPICS OF INVENTION

20. THE THREE APPEALS

21. LEARNING TRANSFER

22. WRITE OUTLINES

23. KAIROS & STASIS

24. SOCIAL SKILLS

Keep in mind that these skills are not meant to be learned all at once, or understood immediately. They are *skills*. They take time to *develop*. You have to *use* them—to practice. Nobody gets this stuff over night and you can always refine your technique, no matter what your skill level is.

Do not be discouraged by what lies ahead of you. Instead, realize that the way to greatness has never been through gimmicks or tricks, but through hard work applied consistently over long periods of time. I've made the task a little bit easier for you, but the work is yours and yours alone. They say it takes thirty days to form a new habit, **but** it takes **six months** to *change the brain*. That six month point is where you really start making connections. Things get interesting.

THESE TOOLS ARE PRESENTED AT A BEGINNER'S
LEVEL, *BUT THEY ARE WORTHY OF A MASTER'S USE.*

“Preparation for tomorrow is hard work today.”

--Bruce Lee

“Nothing is particularly hard if you divide it into small jobs.”

--Henry Ford



GRAMMAR

“The building blocks.”

DECONSTRUCT

When going mountain climbing, you do not reach the top of the mountain in one move. You begin by taking a small step, followed by another, and another, and so on until eventually you reach the summit. What starts off as a daunting task is accomplished through the simplest of means—taking small steps.

Deconstruction is a similar thing. Whatever the problem is that you're working on, no matter how challenging or difficult, if you just break it down into smaller parts then the whole thing becomes more manageable. This is the secret to getting big projects done.

Think of a child exploring a new toy robot. Tinkering with it, seeing what makes its parts move, what holds it together, can it be fixed once it's broken? The child is very innocent and knows little or nothing about toy robots, it lets curiosity be the guide in discovering just what this thing is. You want to be like that child. You cannot assume you know much of anything about your subject as you turn it over, inspect it, consider the various parts, etc. Don't be influenced in your exploration by outside sources.

When starting with a big subject, seek the big picture first to get a general sense of the territory, and then work towards identifying the smaller pieces. Break it down until you get to pieces small enough for you to deal with head-on, developing your reservoir of understanding, and then build from the ground up. Connect pieces together like a puzzle. The "*For Dummies*" learning series are great books for learning the basics of a subject and identifying the smaller moving parts.

I'd come to see Deconstruction as a necessary tool early on but I didn't have a term for it until I read Tim Ferriss' book, *4-Hour Chef*. He has a few of his own suggestions for Deconstruction (Reducing, Interviewing, Reversal, Translation) but his idea to Interview an expert is on point. Someone that has already excelled in the thing that you're learning will be a great resource for you. They can give you information that is the most helpful for you, considering your interest in the topic

Let me give you an example of Deconstruction from my children's messy bedroom. One day my kids told me that they like to keep their room messy. Being a curious and agreeable father I allowed them to keep their room messy for a while. I think they just liked the chaos, the untidy aesthetic. Unfortunately for them, after about a month or two of this, I decided enough was enough and told them that it was time to clean up. They moaned and groaned but they agreed that it was getting to be a bit too messy and that it should be cleaned up—but only on the condition that I help. I've trained them well. . .

I decided to make it an object lesson. I was going to teach them how to organize chaos. So we sorted the mess into little piles of toys according to their likeness. We had a pile for vehicles, for figurines, for Legos, and so on. After about twenty minutes we had everything sorted out into little piles, and then we put everything in its right place. It was an easy way to demonstrate the skill of deconstruction, in a non-studying environment, and they also got some experience with the important habit of noticing the similarities and differences in things (see: Topics of Invention). We could have started in one corner of the room and put everything away as we went along, but it would have taken much longer. By breaking the job down into smaller parts we got it done quickly and easily.

TAKE NOTES/ANNOTATION

Whenever you find yourself in a learning situation, you should be taking notes. This applies the most to book learning, but even when you start a new job you can learn so much better by taking notes. This is one of the most valuable skills you could ever develop. Taking notes helps you to begin collecting and start organizing knowledge.

Write in your books. I was always thought it was wrong to write in my books but now I think the opposite is true. Own your book. The best way to really get in touch with it is to write your notes inside of it. True story.

Mortimer Adler called it **Active Reading** when taking notes while reading-- stopping to underline unknown words, jotting down sudden thoughts that arise while reading, making comments about the ideas, etc. He called it **Active Listening** when taking notes while someone was speaking. The term “Active” distinguishes your activity from the term “Passive”, which is how most of us have learned to absorb information. Passively. Not questioning things much. Not engaging with the material. Just *blah*.

All of that is behind you now. From now on you’re going to underline things, circle things, make little marks and symbols, jot down questions and comments, and otherwise OWN the very thing that you are studying! Note taking doesn’t have to be boring, either. You can, *and should*, make it very visual.

When I’m not writing in a book, I have a piece of paper with me, and you’ll see in my notes varying sizes in writing, key terms outlined or boxed-in, little pictures, arrows, exclamations, highlighting, and any kind of distinguishable writing that helps me to organize the information without having to look at rows of just words. Get creative. Look into things like Learning Maps, Cognitive Maps, and Adler’s Annotation for more clues.

Another aspect on note taking that is more hidden but no less important, is the way in which this skill helps your brain to form more organized neural connections. By using notes as a way to make sense of the information, your brain has less work to do in making connections and finding a place for all of this new stuff to go. **That’s smart.**

SPACED REPETITION

How many times have you been up late, cramming for a test the next day? We've all been there. Even though I was always a good test taker, I still had my moments of frustration when I was just hours from a test and didn't understand a key concept. Luckily, I mostly studied in smaller chunks of time in the weeks leading up to a test. You see, I was lazy, so I learned each section as it was covered in class, doing only enough work to understand the material. When it was time for a test, I aced most subjects without putting as much effort in as the other students.

It turns out my "laziness" has some scientific backing. It's called the Spacing Effect. To borrow from Wikipedia: "the **spacing effect** is the phenomenon whereby animals (including humans) more easily remember or learn items when they are studied a few times spaced over a long time span rather than repeatedly studied in a short span of time. "

In other words, don't try and learn everything all at once. The brain responds well when it is given large chunks of information followed by an appropriate time to organize it all.

In his *4-Hour Chef*, Tim Ferriss talks about the *serial position effect*, which shows how the learning process is slowest in the middle of a long session, but not the beginning and end. Basically what this means is that in a ninety-minute study session, memory retention dips around the halfway point. But if you break up the session into two forty-five minute segments with a ten-minute break in between, retention goes up dramatically. So even if you see dips in learning at the halfway point in a forty-five minute session, it will still not be as bad as doing a full ninety-minute session all at once.

Research shows that cramming has good results in the short-term, which means that it works to help you remember the information but not for very long. If you're learning something you want to really know, use Spaced Repetition exclusively, but if you have a test the next day then cramming will also come to your aid.

TAKE A BREAK

DISCOVER THE HISTORY OF A SUBJECT

Nothing exists in a vacuum. Everything you want to learn, any skill or subject, has a history. By looking into the history of a thing we may gain greater insight into exactly what it is, what it is for, and what it might be in the future.

A friend told me a story once. He was tutoring a teenager that wanted to learn Calculus. My friend's advice was simple: seek the history of calculus first. Within a few months the teenager had gone on and studied Calculus, starting with the history, and was able to take the equivalency exams at a community college. By knowing the history the student had a better understanding of the subject.

What led to its origin? What historical, social, and scientific and other context(s) did it arise in? Who are some of the leading figures? How has it evolved over time? What is its relevance today?



TO KNOW
WHERE YOU'RE
GOING YOU
NEED TO KNOW
WHERE YOU'VE
BEEN

DISTINGUISH MATERIALS

In his video presentation, *How To Read A Book*, Mortimer Adler instructs us early on to distinguish the type of book we're reading. Is it for fun? Is it instructive? Is it informative? It's very important for us to know what kind of information we're taking in to insure the best outcome in our learning.

When encountering information that is meant to teach us about a subject, we should first ask if we're dealing with what is called a "primary source." Primary sources are original materials, unaltered by outside interpretation or translation. Seek primary sources whenever possible, although the older a text or topic is, the more difficult this may become. Most of the Great Books were written in languages other than English, and so have been translated many times in order for us to gain from their wisdom. For some students, the primary source written in its original language is the only thing that will suffice. For others, a very good translation will do. Sometimes it is fruitful to compare translations, as not all are created equally.

Primary sources are crucial in studying history. For example, American public schools teach how Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue and discovered his friends, the Native Americans. This is taught by teachers that are not using primary sources, and the true history paints a much different, and much less friendly, picture than the whitewash of schooling provides. Primary sources give a more accurate depiction of events than heavily biased (even fraudulent!) government schooling ever will.

If you're reading specifically to uplift and strengthen the mind, Plato, Aristotle, or anything of that caliber will do. These you will take time on and read numerous times. The learning skills here will enable you to handle even those high-level books.

THIS TYPE OF READING IS NOT DRIVEN
PRIMARILY BY A THIRST FOR THE IDEAS, BUT A
CHANCE FOR THE PRACTICE.

SELECTION

What you're looking for in Selection are the things that are most important to learn first. Seek the essentials. When you strip something down to its core, what are you left with? What do you have to have in order to know this thing? When beginning to study Geometry, you don't attempt to learn it all at once. You deconstruct and work your way up. Selection reminds us to choose wisely which pieces to learn first, and which can wait for later on. It may not always be easy finding that 20% but now you know to look for it, and always remember to contact the professionals to help with your direction.

In the early 1900's, Italian economist Alfredo Pareto discovered that 20% of his pods contained 80% of his peas. Starting from there he later realized that 80% of the land was owned by only 20% of the population. Others have explored this work in other fields and have expanded the concept into what is now called the 80/20 Principle.

A good way of putting it is this: when learning something new, what is the 20% of activity or understanding that will give you 80% of the results you're looking for? You're trying to learn Astrophysics but do you need to know every single thing about it? Or can you focus your studies like a laser on the 20% of knowledge that is the most universal?

In kung fu there are certain basic movements and body mechanics that apply to all of the most advanced moves. First learn the basics, the universal, must-have knowledge, and then you will be ready to receive the advanced teachings. More than that, by learning the basic moves you are learning to streamline your attack, and to use the least amount of bodily energy to inflict the most amount of damage. Watch an old tai chi master pushing hands with a student; when that student flies back ten feet from the smallest movement of the master, there is a reason why.

WHAT IS THE 20% OF ACTIVITY OR
UNDERSTANDING THAT WILL GIVE YOU 80% OF
THE RESULTS YOU'RE LOOKING FOR?

CONCENTRATION

I've tried writing this section a few times but I keep getting distracted. First it was my phone making noises. I posted something on Facebook today and I'm getting notifications about people's comments. Gotta check those. Then, my girlfriend was home from work and struck up a conversation. Then I thought, "maybe I've been sitting too long and should workout for a little bit," and then shortly after that, I got a little hungry so I made a snack. There goes my phone again, I'm up to 36 likes! Ugh. . . what was that one thing I wanted to Google yesterday? Something about tire pressure in the summer? Wait, no, that was something else, but I want to see what kind of deals they have at Goodyear right now. I hear Spring is a good time to buy tires! Ok, now I'm ready to write this thing. I think. Text message beep! Yes, I'm totally down to go out tonight—I NEED A DRINK! I've been working hard today. Let's see who else wants to come out tonight. I hate when people don't reply right away because sometimes you start doing something else and th--- oh, she got back to me! It's on! We're closing the bar tonight, baby! Hmmm, I should probably do laundry real quick, I can't wear these sweatpants out! Oh man, I'm getting hungry again, *for real*. I'll just cook a pizza. OH MY GOD! There's that screwdriver I was looking for yesterday! The one I was looking for when I was trying to fix the toy I broke when I was messing around after lunch when I was supposed. . . to be. . . writing. . . about Concentration.

Concentration is absolutely essential to learning. Without it, literally nothing gets done. Well at least not anything you're intending to get done. You might check thirteen emails, draft your will, iron a shirt and take the dog for a walk, but you didn't sit down and read that book or write that paper. You sure as shit didn't meet your goals for the day. There are many things out there to help you learn to concentrate, one comes from Rev. Opitz who said that you must sit down to read, and whenever you find your mind wandering, "grab it by the scruff of it's neck" and bring it back to the page. **It works.** My own personal suggestion is to study Tai Chi (preferably Chen style) as it requires mental AND physical concentration unlike anything else I've encountered.

PAY ATTENTION AND FOCUS

LOGIC

“*These* are not *those*.”

WINNOWING

The basic function of Logic in the Trivium Method is Organization, and to organize we must make distinctions. We must separate things according to their likeness. We weigh things against each other and eliminate the contradictions. We make sense. Human beings are sometimes referred to as the “rational animal,” and rational comes from the word *ratio*, which is a mathematical distinction between two integers. It’s a way of telling things apart, or of saying, “*These* are not *those*.”

One of the discoveries I made when first researching the Trivium is that the “secret society” of the Freemasons uses the liberal arts and sciences in their initiation system. Knowing nothing about the organization other than internet conspiracy theory (Illuminati, Bilderberg, reptilian overlords, etc.), I followed my curiosity and sought out the **context** in which they taught these things. Separated into three degrees, the Blue Lodge of Freemasonry begins by guiding the member to focus on personal development of character and virtue in the first degree (I will be covering this a little bit more later on in the section on emotional development). After providing the tools for developing character the member goes on to the second degree, where *the major focus is on the Trivium and Quadrivium*. Their third degree focuses more on spiritual contemplation and mortality.

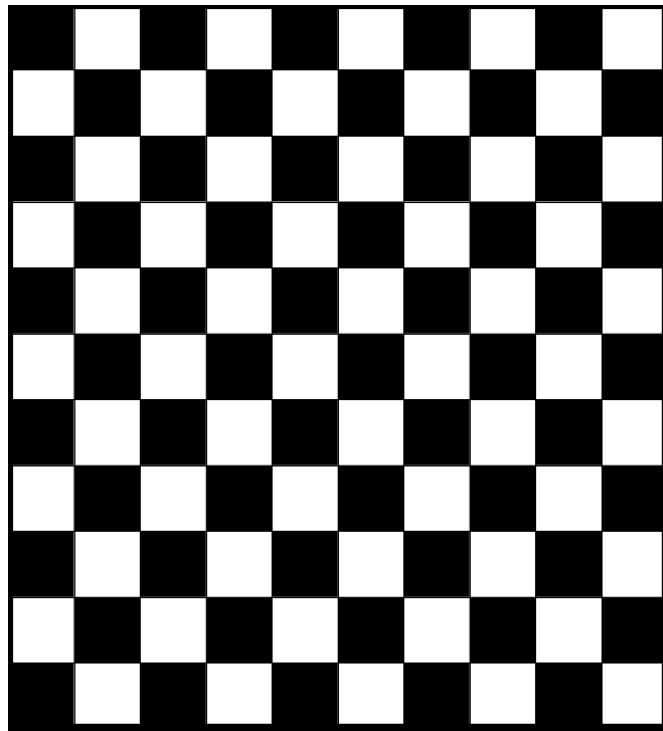
So first they instruct the member to work on their emotions, then on their mind, and then finally on that which is considered spiritual. They do all of this through ritual utilizing symbols, metaphor, and allegory.

One symbol in particular is important to be aware of: the Threshing Floor. Without going into details about the biblical source from which this symbol is derived, the Threshing Floor is a checkered floor, composed of black and white tiles, and it is there that the process of winnowing, of separating the wheat from the chaff, is accomplished. This symbol is described in various ways by numerous authors, but my own personal understanding of it is as a representation of the human function of discernment. Of knowing one thing from another. The black and white squares are a universal symbol for this process of discernment. And then you have the activity of winnowing itself, yet another way to understand the human function of rationality.

Masons often understand this process of winnowing to represent the activity of ridding oneself of the superfluities and vices within them, of separating the important from the unimportant, the essential from the inessential.

It is said that Solomon's Temple was built upon the Threshing Floor. The Temple is, to my understanding, a symbol for the developed human mind and soul (mental and emotional selves). So the great temple of the inner life, *the house not built by hands*, rests upon a foundation of discernment, of rationality, of logic. The Masons take it upon themselves to see themselves as Builders of this structure, and their educational efforts are geared directly towards this activity.

For more information on this see the works of Dr. John Nagy (in particular the books *Building Athens* and *Building Boaz*).



FIND THE ARGUMENT

When reading a book or listening to a speech or a lecture, our most important task is to find out what it is the author or speaker is trying to say. What is their point or points? With a book you have more time to go through each sentence, piece together the ones that really seem to support each other, and discover the argument that way. In a live setting it can be more difficult, but it is required of us nonetheless.

What truth is there to the statements? Does the argument rest upon false premises? What problems does the author attempt to solve? Which ones were solved, which ones not? Is the author missing key information? Have they missed important questions relevant to the subject? Is their argument concealed, improved, or diminished by persuasive elements? Do their statements make their point by cause and effect? Are they unfounded?

When you're the author you have to find your own argument. You have to know what it is you want to say, and how you're going to say it. You have the choice to make your audience work for understanding or to lay everything out clearly and cleanly. Mortimer Adler's *How To Read A Book* is a great resource for more understanding in this way, and for the student an ACT/SAT prep book on Reading will show you the guidelines that test makers are looking for. Also, the "argument" in math is much different than the arguments in the humanities, and they require much more straightforward logical skills. Although much less beautiful to the ear, the "arguments" of Euclid are arguments nonetheless and they require of us utmost diligence in their discovery.

WE SEEK IN OUR READING TO GO
FROM A STATE OF UNDERSTANDING
LESS, TO UNDERSTANDING MORE.

--MORTIMER J. ADLER

DEFINE TERMS

Which witch is which? When having a conversation or learning something new, there are bound to be words that carry very specific meanings. Find out what those are. If you don't know the definitions of the words (the terms) then you really can't begin to understand what is being said. How does Shakespeare's definition of Love differ from Voltaire's? What did Sally really *mean* when she said, "It's fine, just go without me?"

Often times you can learn the definition of a term by consulting a common dictionary. This doesn't work in every situation, though, such as in law practice where seemingly common terms have very different, and specific, meanings (see *Black's Law Dictionary*). Other times you have to work hard to understand what a term means. Again, you can't really know what's being said if you don't know how the terms are defined. One mans "economic development" might be another mans "losing my home because the rich man wants to put a shopping mall here." Labor means one thing to the Capitalist, and another to the Tyrant.

When learning a new subject, such as Algebra 2, you'll come across new words that seem foreign to you. Always-always-always underline those terms and work hard at figuring out what they mean. What context are they used in? Do they have limited, alternative, or provisional meanings? Can the same term be used in different ways?

Leave no term undefined.

Assiduous. Plenitude. Sagacity. People see "big words" like those, get turned off, and give up trying. They feel dumb because they haven't expanded their vocabulary that far. Some people are just good with words, they say. If you ever find yourself in that category I want to tell you right now, once and for all, that that is **bullshit!** YOU can learn any of the hardest words in the world.

It's easy once you learn the definition (the concepts underlying the word) and, if still confused, learn definitions for the conceptual words that build up to it. Look at the history of the word's usage. See what context it is used in most appropriately. Work-work-work until you can use the word in a conversation, *and then do it.*

REASONING: DEDUCTIVE AND INDUCTIVE

The methods of deductive and inductive reasoning are too lengthy to reproduce in this essay, but it is important to give some general sense of their nature here.

Deductive reasoning relates to what is known as top-down thinking. Starting from basic, general principles and working towards specific instances. Deduction focuses upon the relationship of premises to conclusion. If the premises are true, terms are clear, and rules of deduction are applied, then the conclusion must be true. In deduction, we're seeking to arrive at certainty.

Example: All cars require tires to drive. John's car has no tires. Therefore, John's car will not drive.

Inductive reasoning relates to bottom-up thinking. Starting with specific instances we can begin to form some sort of general principles. While still using the tools of premises and conclusion, inductive reasoning hopes to arrive at probable truths. By taking the available information, induction can only say what *seems* to be true, as opposed to what *must* be true. Induction leaves room for the possibility that the conclusion can be false even though the premises are true.

Example: Most people hate the smell of skunk spray. Jenny is a person. Therefore, Jenny probably hates the smell of skunk spray.

Practice with Deductive and Inductive reasoning sharpens the mind and increases speed of comprehension.

SPOT THE FALLACIES

Ad Hominem! Slippery Slope! Appeal to Authority! Such are the exclamations of those that spot a fallacy in a book or conversation. When you learn the fallacies, you start to see them everywhere: magazines, books, advertisements, political speeches, even internet forums (-rolls eyes-). Heck, even my grandma spotted one the other day. They're everywhere! There might even be a few fallacies underneath your bed, or in your closet. I hope you check before you go to sleep tonight. One can never be too careful, logical fallacies abound. . .

A list of the fallacies as well as the distinction between **Formal** and **Informal** fallacies are outside of the scope of this essay, but any book on logic will cover them in detail. There are a common 20 or so informal fallacies that one would be better for having memorized. Some people even make a game of spotting fallacies, and calling them aloud, when watching things like presidential debates or television commercials. Fun for the whole family.

Logical fallacies arise from one of two options: either from outright deception or just simple ignorance. *The mere presence of a fallacy does not imply either origin--* it is up to the audience to determine if the fallacy was committed maliciously or not. The presence of a fallacy does not have any bearing on the truth values of the premises or conclusions, it just means that some flaws in reasoning have occurred and so clarification must be made.

Some find it wise to avoid calling out the names of fallacies, instead addressing the underlying flaw in reasoning, while others decide it best to simply call out the name of the fallacy committed and assume amends will be made. Or maybe they're just looking to score points. Whatever the case may be, and the tactic used to deal with them, logical fallacies are always an indication of faulty reasoning and should be recognized to some degree whenever they're encountered.

Recognition of fallacies is not just a tool for discerning the truth in other's speech or writing, it is most useful in sorting out our own thinking as well. In all of the Trivium skills, we will find many that can be applied to the self as well as to others.

NOTICE STRUCTURE

This essay is arranged to focus on learning/study skills by arranging them into the three Trivium categories. There are words before and after the skills sections, but the focus remains clear. Because of this you know that I put great importance upon the skills. But what if I chose to put less emphasis upon them and instead devoted more words to the introductory sections, or to the later sections on emotional and physical development? The reader might assume that the skills are less important than the rest of the topics. If I did that it could be argued that I intentionally deceived the readers, or that I decided it better to let them figure it out for themselves rather than provide the clues openly. Perhaps I just dropped hints throughout the text that the skills were truly important, leaving only the discerning reader the ability to know the hidden message. Either way, the structure of the writing informs the outcome to some degree.

By paying attention to the structure, more knowledge and understanding can be gained from the writing, more information can be revealed to the reader. It also helps to understand the whole piece by noticing how it's parts are arranged.

Perhaps the first three chapters of a book are really just an outline of a principle argument, the next two chapters containing a second argument. By noticing this we don't get lost in seeing each chapter as an argument in themselves, but instead as parts to a whole. Upon finishing the book maybe we've realized that in twelve chapters the author outlined three principle arguments, rather than seeing chapter after chapter of smaller points. And maybe those three arguments combine to form a larger, unspoken argument.

IN ANY
PRESENTATION
YOU ENCOUNTER,
THERE WILL BE A
STRUCTURE TO IT
THAT YOU CAN
DISCERN.

COMPARE EXPECTATIONS TO EXPERIENCE

“I know not any thing more pleasant, or more instructive, than to compare experience with expectation, or to register from time to time the difference between ideas and reality. It is by this kind of observation that we grow daily less liable to be disappointed. You, who are very capable of anticipating futurity, and raising phantoms before your own eyes, must often have imagined to yourself an academical life, and have conceived what would be the manners, the views, and the conversation, of men devoted to letters; how they would choose their companions, how they would direct their studies, and how they would regulate their lives. Let me know what you have expected and what you have found.”

--Boswell's Life of Johnson

To compare what you expect with what you experience is a tremendous source of insight in any of life's situations. We learn the best sometimes through analogy, by way of comparison. It helps to be aware of our own expectations, or preconceived notions, because that is the standard we measure our experiences with. More accurate adjustments in our thinking and perceptions can be made when we actually seek what is truly there, as opposed to clinging blindly to what we believed to be.

What better way to become aware of context? Or intentions? Isn't it better to level your expectations to the reality of a situation, rather than insisting that reality conform to your beliefs? Learning through experience is the best instruction available. Having the flexibility to adjust to reality is crucial and will save you a lot of trouble.

MORE & FURTHER

What is More? What is Further? These questions are found throughout the catechism-style book I mentioned, *Building Athens*. They are powerful tools, calling us to look deeper, to seek what is beyond the obvious. The search for Truth teaches us not to stop at the immediate face of things, to look beyond the façade of what is presented to us, and to see what else there is to know about the subject.

John Medina's book,
Brain Rules, ends with a topic I
was going to begin this essay
with: **Curiosity**.

Medina describes how curiosity
is at the bedrock of the human
imagination, the thing that keeps us looking for more answers and seeing things from
different angles.

Curiosity causes us to ask the big questions in life. It is the reason we once held beliefs about the stars. We looked up and wondered, and over time our observations were turned into myths about the sky. Curiosity doesn't ask, "Can we do this?" but instead screams, "How can this be done!?" It was curiosity that led our mammalian ancestors to come down from the trees and wander off into unknown distances, shortening our arms but enlarging our brains (if you believe in that sort of thing). It is the thing that leads us to seek our potential and the reason for our accomplishments as a species, successes and failures alike. It is our greatest human resource. **Stay curious.**

CURIOUS MINDS SEEK BETTER WAYS OF
ORGANIZING INFORMATION, TO COME TO NEW
UNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT A BODY OF
KNOWLEDGE.

RHETORIC

“Whatchu talkin’ bout, Willis?”

PARAPHRASE

When learning to write (and by writing you can discover, organize, and clarify your thinking), one of the most powerful exercises you have is the Paraphrase. To start, you simply take a passage from a book and rewrite it in your own words. Try and capture the essence of what was said, putting it in a way that is unique to you. Practice with varying lengths. First paraphrase the passage into one sentence, then two sentences, and then a paragraph. This works for conversational situations, too. Take a conversation you recently had and try and “put it” into one sentence. Then try putting it into two sentences, then three sentences and so on.

This exercise forces you to look at the essence of a group of ideas, to comprehend the underlying meaning in any communication. It also gives you exercise in word selection and phrasing. You should always keep a dictionary and a thesaurus at hand.

Another use of paraphrase in a conversation is to reiterate back to the other person what it is you think they just said, or are trying to get at. This gives them an opportunity to see if they are, in fact, getting their point across well, and it gives you the chance to perfect your ability to find the essence of someone’s communication to you. So many misunderstandings can be avoided if people check to make sure they know what the other person is saying!

Benjamin Franklin used the paraphrase pretty well (you should read his autobiography some time):

“About this time I met with an odd volume of the Spectator. It was the third. I had never before seen any of them. I bought it, read it over and over, and was much delighted with it. I thought the writing excellent, and wished, if possible, to imitate it. With this view I took some of the papers, and, making short hints of the sentiment in each sentence, laid them by a few days, and then, without looking at the book, try’d to compleat the papers again, by expressing each hinted sentiment at length, and as fully as it had been expressed before, in any suitable words that should come to hand. Then I compared my Spectator with the original, discovered some of my faults, and corrected them.

But I found I wanted a stock of words, or a readiness in recollecting and using them, which I thought I should have acquired before that time if I had gone on making verses; since the continual occasion for words of the same import, but of different length, to suit the measure, or of different sound for the rhyme, would have laid me under a constant necessity of searching for variety, and also have tended to fix that variety in my mind, and make me master of it. Therefore I took some of the tales and turned them into verse; and, after a time, when I had pretty well forgotten the prose, turned them back again. I also sometimes jumbled my collections of hints into confusion, and after some weeks endeavored to reduce them into the best order, before I began to form the full sentences and compleat the paper.

This was to teach me method in the arrangement of thoughts. By comparing my work afterwards with the original, I discovered many faults and amended them; but I sometimes had the pleasure of fancying that, in certain particulars of small import, I had been lucky enough to improve the method or the language, and this encouraged me to think I might possibly in time come to be a tolerable English writer, of which I was extremely ambitious.”

THE PROBLEMS THAT
VEXED THE ANCIENTS
IN THEIR EFFORTS TO
GAIN CONTROL OF
LANGUAGE VARIED
LITTLE FROM THOSE
THAT TROUBLE US
TODAY.

Another paraphrase exercise, the Chreia, is found in Clapp & Kane’s wonderful old book on Rhetoric, *How To Talk* (available at the Internet Archive):

“In the paraphrase your effort is to supply appropriate words and to fit them to the author’s scheme for the thought of the passage. Here is another exercise in which, supplied with an idea, you develop it for yourself in the most effective language you can muster. Choose an old saying, or select from a work you may happen to be reading a particular assertion or remark, and without reading the author’s development of the idea proceed for yourself to expand the statement in any way you please. Talk right out. Present your thoughts to a mirror in as convincing a manner as you can, or if you have a

companion in the task of improving speech technique, the two of you may profitably play audience for each other.

For this is exactly what you do in conversation, or in discussion when the statement of another draws from you the development of support or opposition. It is the thing that you are prompted to do in your club meeting. Only in this exercise you may be patient with yourself. You will have no interruptions; you can present your whole flow of thought. Just try the exercise. You will find that it provides a whole series of steps in the process of making flow of language serve the flow of thought. You will discover that the fluency we admire so much in certain others is to be had for the fair price of the application and industry required to persist in the exercises that build or help to build a valuable habit.

A practical device of the Greeks.—There is nothing new about this exercise. You can try it in its earliest forms. It was the device of Aphthonius, one of the ancient rhetoricians, who proposed to his pupils a ‘chreia,’ or suggestive sentence to be developed by certain rules.

Often the chreia was a maxim or proverb, current on the lips of the people. At times it was a statement from the writings of one of the great philosophers, or it might be the statement of a fact involving the expression of a truth. To develop any of the forms of the chreia, Aphthonius proposed eight different plans:

1. By commendation or approval of the saying.
2. By a paraphrase—expressing the meaning of the sentence in other words, with some further development or explanation.
3. By cause or reason—telling why the maxim is true or why the fact is as stated.
4. By indicating resemblance—illustrating by comparison with similar things.
5. By contrast—illustrating by comparison with contrary things.
6. By giving examples.
7. By citing testimonies or authorities.
8. By a conclusion or appeal addressed to the mind or heart of the listener.

The problems that vexed the ancients in their efforts to gain control of language varied little from those that trouble us today. The formulas listed by Aphonius for developing a thought are those which have been followed in all ages. You will find them interestingly outlined, with illustrations from modern writers and speakers, in Genung's 'Working Principles of Rhetoric,' or Baldwin's 'Oral and Written Composition.'" (Ed.: both titles are available at the Internet Archive as well.)

THE RHETORICAL TRIANGLE

Here is where you begin to see that Rhetoric is not only useful for composition, but for analysis as well. In my opinion, the Triangle should be the first device you use in any rhetorical moment as it organizes the various parts and allows you to use the further tools of analysis such as checking for fallacies and logical consistency.

There are a few different versions of the Triangle that I have seen but I think the best one is the most basic: each of the three points separates the Author, the Text (or Message or Argument), and the Audience. Encircling the Triangle is Context. Right away it's clear that this device makes certain distinctions, and those distinctions help you see through the illusion of the moment.

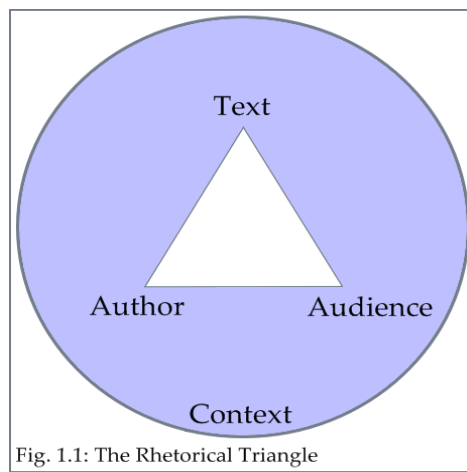


Fig. 1.1: The Rhetorical Triangle

Normally, people are exposed to advertisements with little thought to the company's intention. Advertisement professionals use our base fears to sell us product. Maybe they get us to think we're too fat, too ugly, or too old, or not popular, and are unlikeable in some way. They love using logical fallacies! Their product, they say, is just the thing that we need to fit in or look sexier. But when you put the advertisement on the Rhetorical Triangle, you can consciously start to separate what they're telling you from their probable intentions, and therefore not be influenced by unconscious persuaders. If you realize that cosmetics companies are preying on your desire to look young or fit in, then perhaps you can choose not to be manipulated in that way, or at the

least to not feel the desire to have to obtain every new product that comes out promising to take ten years off of your skin!

By considering the author's intention, we can glean a lot of knowledge about the integrity of the message. Likewise when we are composing, or writing, we can use the triangle to consciously determine what our intention is, and craft our message for the specific audience we are trying to reach, given the overall context we are in.

The competent use of Rhetoric is a skill we should all be practiced in, but unfortunately our education system deems it largely unworthy, and even in those brief instances where Rhetoric is touched upon in some English class, it is taught inadequately and without the full knowledge of Rhetoric's importance and what it can do. For anyone interested in really sinking their teeth into the subject of Rhetoric, you can do no better than to start with the revised edition of Jay Heinrich's book, *Thank You For Arguing*. If you want to learn Rhetoric, just go buy that book today! The second best book, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, 4th edition, is much pricier but it covers in more depth many of the principles Heinrichs covers, although without the palatable examples of Homer Simpson quotes, or the analysis of Barack Obama's speaking skills.

FIVE CANONS OF RHETORIC

When you are planning to write something, you need a subject. Then you have to have something to say about the subject, some angle from which you will cover it, various points you would like to make. This is called INVENTION.

Then you have to consider the order in which to give your points. Which points should come first, which ones support the main argument, and what should you end it with? This is called ARRANGEMENT.

To recall back to the Rhetorical Triangle, you have to consider your audience. Depending upon who is in that audience, what their tastes and preferences are, your choice of words and phrasing will change. You wouldn't address an audience of school children the same way you would a company of doctors. This is called STYLE.

Your next consideration is whether or not you will give your presentation from memory, or from notes, or even read from a text. Will you use PowerPoint? Will you just have a few sketches of your argument and plan to improvise the rest as you go? This is called MEMORY.

Finally, when all of those other considerations are taken care of, you have to figure out how you're going to present this information. Is it a recording? A writing? A live speech? When speaking it is important to think about the tone of your voice, your sense of rhythm and speed, the volume of your voice and when to raise it or lower it, and so on. This is called DELIVERY.

Together, these comprise the Five Canons of Rhetoric. Three of the Rhetoric books previously mentioned are particularly useful in learning the Canons. *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student, 4th Edition*, covers Invention, Arrangement, and Style in great depth, providing not only explanation but also **rhetorical analyses** of various pieces of historical writing. *Thank You For Arguing* covers all of the Canons but Memory, giving examples from popular culture and ancient writing. *How To Talk* by Clapp & Kane gives the most to the Canon of Delivery. And finally, for the Canon of Memory, Francis Yates' *Art of Memory* is a valuable resource.

INVENTION – ARRANGEMENT – STYLE – MEMORY – DELIVERY

TOPICS OF INVENTION

The Topics of Invention, or Common Topics could fit within the study of Logic because they ways in which the mind thinks about a problem. I suggest they be learned along with the logical fallacies. The article by Richard Larson, *Discovery Through Questioning*, turns the Topics into a series of questions that can be asked about the subject, and anyone looking for ways to ask better questions would do well to study that article. This helps you figure out what to say. The Topics of Invention are:

Definition

- A. Genus
- B. Division

Comparison

- A. Similarity
- B. Difference
- C. Degree

Relationship

- A. Cause and Effect
- B. Antecedent and Consequence
- C. Contraries
- D. Contradictions

Circumstance

- A. Possible and Impossible
- B. Past Fact and Future Fact

Testimony

- A. Authority
- B. Testimonial
- C. Statistics
- D. Maxims
- E. Laws
- F. Precedents (Examples)

Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student goes into the most depth about the Topics, and even gives a few rhetorical analyses that outline the use of the Topics in famous speeches and writing. It's amazing how well that great orators, from the founding fathers to Martin Luther King, Jr. have utilized the Common Topics to construct extremely persuasive arguments. By simply arranging ideas in certain juxtapositions, thoughts are built up for the audience that come alive within them as they listen, and often times if the orator is very skilled, the audience will come away from the speech with a desire to take action—usually the action recommended by the orator.

THE THREE APPEALS

Aristotle wrote in his book *Art of Rhetoric*, that there are three modes, or appeals, that are effective in persuading the audience. Ethos, Logos, and Pathos.

Ethos is concerned with the speaker's character. What kind of person he or she is, and what makes them worthy of listening to. "Vote for me because I'm a hard working tax payer and father of three!"

Logos is the logical appeal. When using Logos, you're trying to lay things out precisely and rationally. You're not trying to rile the crowd up in support of your cause, or get them to believe you're the nicest guy on Earth. Your main task is to make the clear argument in defense of your cause, the step by step reasoning process of why you're right. "Because of X, and Y, and Z, we can clearly expect A and B to happen again, so we should take actions C and D in order to stop it!"

Pathos is the appeal to emotion. It doesn't concern the listener with the speaker's character, or try and even make a logical argument, it deals directly with the emotional component of the subject and uses those triggers to persuade the audience. "Are we going to let *them* win? Are we going to let *them* get in the way of making the world *safe for freedom*? No!!! Now, let's go drop some bombs to protect our free country!"

Jay Heinrichs recommends that you use the three appeals in the order I've outlined them here: Ethos, Logos, and *then* Pathos. It kind of makes sense if you think about it. You're giving a speech or writing a book, and ultimately you want the audience to do something. So you start by establishing your credentials and character. They need a reason to believe you're the person that should be giving them this information. Then you want to lay out just what it is that you're arguing, so you need to make a logical argument. And finally, you want to engage their emotions, and hopefully in such a way that they actually choose for themselves to take the action you've recommended. For the most part this is a safe strategy for utilizing the three appeals but ultimately, BUT each situation needs to be considered by itself. The phrase, "it depends," should be spoken often when making rhetorical considerations.

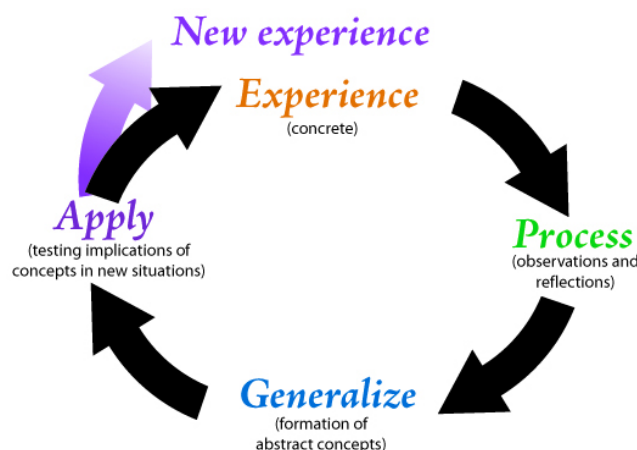
ETHOS – LOGOS – PATHOS

TRANSFER OF LEARNING

Transfer of learning is where the knowledge gained in one field or subject applies to another. This is where we see beyond the subject, where we relate our previous understandings to each new situation. First you Experience concrete events or understandings. You then Process the information through observation and reflection. Then you Generalize your understanding by forming abstract concepts, and Apply all of this by testing the implications of your concepts in a new Experience. It's a learning cycle appropriate for all occasions—dress or casual.

To quote from Dorothy Sayers' essay, the Lost Tools of Learning:
“Do you often come across people for whom, all their lives, a ‘subject’ remains a ‘subject,’ divided by watertight bulkheads from all other ‘subjects,’ so that they experience very great difficulty in making an immediate mental connection between let us say, algebra and detective fiction, sewage disposal and the price of salmon—or, more generally, between such spheres of knowledge as philosophy and economics, or chemistry and art?”

Dr. John Nagy, in his book Building Athens, describes learning transfer a couple times. Once on page 134, “By examining, understanding, and following Euclid's methods, Masons train their minds to do this (geometrical/logical proofs) in other areas unrelated to Geometry,” and again on page 198 while discussing the Twelve Challenges when raising one's thinking, “It is projecting these insights in many directions and under many varying conditions *to determine how they could apply elsewhere.*”



KAIROS & STASIS

Kairos is the Greek term for “the right moment.” In Greek mythology Kairos was the youngest child of Zeus, and was the god of Opportunity. Kairos reminds us to choose our words wisely, and to be aware of the rhetorical contingencies of the moment. In comedy you have jokes that start with a premise and usually end with some sort of punch line that makes you laugh. If

your timing is off, and maybe you tell the punch line a little too quickly, the effect of the joke diminishes.

The same applies in conversation—when we find the right words and say them at the right moment our words have more impact. There’s no clear guide for how to achieve

Kairos, but you know it when it happens. Each rhetorical moment

carries it’s own context, and it’s own particular audience, so to know when Kairos is achievable is a subtle art, and one worth working toward. Jacques Barzun wrote in his book, *Simple and Direct*, about “diction” as choosing the proper words, not how the word is said. Improve your word choices by practicing your writing. Over time the right words will start coming to you more easily, and you’ll devote more attention to *how* you say things, and when.

SPEECHES ARE GOOD
ONLY IF THEY HAVE A
SHARE IN WHAT IS
OPPORTUNE (KAIROS),
APPROPRIATENESS OF
STYLE, AND ORIGINALITY.

--ISOCRATES

Stasis is a way of determining what it is that is being discussed. How often are people locked into conversations in which the parties are more or less discussing different things? Arguments are so often this way. No matter what the conversation is, it always helps to know exactly what the topic is. Sometimes you might think you’re talking about cheeseburgers but your friend was trying to comment on the enjoyment of food outdoors in the summer time. Or maybe you’re making a point about politics and

your friend takes it as a personal attack. Make sure you know what the topic or main point of the conversation is and stay on it, manipulators will often confuse the discussion with irrelevant points or arguing side issues.

To help establish Stasis, employ this four-part assessment:

1. **Questions of Fact.** What is it exactly that I'm talking about? Is it a person? An idea? A problem? Does it really exist? What's the source of the problem? Are there facts to support the truth of this opinion?
2. **Questions of Definition.** What's the best way to define this idea/object/action? What are the different parts? Can it be grouped with similar ideas/objects/actions?
3. **Questions of Quality.** Is it good or bad? Is it right or wrong? Is it frivolous or important?
4. **Questions of Procedure/Jurisdiction.** Is this the right venue to discuss this topic? What actions do I want my reader/listener to take?

WRITE OUTLINES

One of the best ways to organize your thoughts for writing or speaking is to make outlines. I do this for everything I write, including this essay. Usually I start with all of the notes, ideas, scribbles, and sketches I've made. Then I start to think about how I want to arrange everything—which parts come first, where is the main argument going to be placed, and how will I end it? Then I start creating sections for each part of the work. Perhaps I just have an introduction, an argument, and a conclusion. Or perhaps, like for this essay, there are many different sections within it. After completing the arrangement, I start to put down main ideas first, with subheadings for any ideas that fall within the main points. So, for instance, my original outline for the section on Deconstruction looked like this:

-Deconstruction

- Break down into smaller parts that are more easily grasped
- Avoid being intimidated by any subject or problem
- Smaller concepts build and lead to larger concepts
- What are the basics, essentials?
- Intro To, "X" for Dummies, etc. to build general map to deconstruct

I did this for each of the skills, as well as the other sections in this essay. In some instances I varied noticeably from my original outline, in other instances, I followed the outline to the letter. By having the outline put together, I could begin constructing my piece without getting lost or forgetting key information. On top of that, new ideas came up and different approaches to the sections were discovered. Writing was more fun because I had most of it laid out for me.

Keep in mind that no first draft is perfect, and when writing or planning a speech, one of the best tools you have is to *read & recite*. Speak out loud the things you're writing to get a sense of their rhythm and to tell if your word choice or phrasing is off.

SOCIAL SKILLS

Social skills are not taught easily through an essay or a book. You need to be “in the wild” to work on these skills. The only practice is face to face. Your opportunities for this kind of growth arrive every time another person comes into the room. At best I can only give you some indications for further study, like so much of this essay.

By studying the Trivium and/or any intellectual pursuit, there is always a common fear that it will make you dry and boring. The exact opposite is true. Because of Rhetoric you should want to improve your “game” and develop the ability to speak to just about any kind of person or group. You can’t do that if you’re dry and boring, or grumpy. Being antisocial disconnects you from everyone’s shared context: *modern society*. Even if we’re not talking about the fixtures of society, they’re always in the background. Our conversations exist in a stew of common experiences.

We must learn how to adjust our mannerisms, speech patterns, and body language, to meet the environment we find ourselves in. In Rhetoric, this is called *decorum*. If we’re on the streets we don’t start speaking like a college professor. No matter where we go, it’s never in our best interest to be rude.

Seduction and Power. I was first introduced to simple concepts about social dynamics when I read Neil Strauss’ book, *The Game*. In it, he went undercover into the world of so-called pickup artists, men who’s skill was to use language, tricks, and gimmicks, to seduce beautiful women and live a rock star lifestyle. I found the book interesting but ultimately wasn’t attracted to the tactics they used. One good thing about that book was that it introduced me to Robert Greene’s book, the *Art of Seduction*. After reading that book, I realized that it was more about human psychology than getting between the sheets. It was no surprise to me that the appendix was a guide on “how to sell to the masses.”

Robert Greene wrote other books that exposed aspects of human psychology, the most important being the *48 Laws of Power*. While certainly some see this as a manual on Machiavellian techniques, it’s not about gaining power over others. It’s about becoming someone that others trust with power, and learning to protect yourself from people that try to gain control over you.

Influence. In Building Athens, John Nagy talks about becoming a Center of Influence inside of a Sphere of Influence, using the symbol of the Circumpunct, or, Point Within the Circle, to illustrate this concept. In other words, he encourages us to use our rhetorical ability to become something of an influence to others-- a Center within a Sphere. When your Rhetoric improves and your social skills increase, you become more influential, and this influence can have an uplifting effect upon those within your Sphere of Influence. Becoming better at Rhetoric means becoming a better people person.

Some of the people in the pickup artist/seduction community produce material useful beyond that field. One resource in particular, a podcast called the Pickup Podcast, hosted by Jordan Harbinger of the Art of Charm, is one that stands out. While the Art of Charm focuses mostly on teaching men the inner and outer game to improve their dating, business, and networking skills, the podcast features many interviews on topics such as charisma, body language, vocal tonality, to teach the listeners how to become better, more likeable, versions of themselves. These are invaluable skills to possess, do not neglect them.



Basic social skills do not have to be grueling. Simple things like smiling whenever you walk into a room, or introducing yourself easily to strangers by just saying hi and giving them your name can be practiced daily. Other things to help you are noticing your posture, making sure you stand tall and healthy looking, learning how to make small talk and keep the banter light and playful, as well as inviting people to talk about themselves rather than keep the conversation focused on you. Be charming.

Humor. Another aspect of social skills that is often overlooked is humor. Some people believe they have a good sense of humor, but when you get them out in public their jokes fall flat. You have to be honest about your interactions and realize when you're not connecting with others, to make adjustments in your character, try new approaches, and *always resist the urge to stay within your comfort zone*. It's easy to stay in your comfort zone when doing something different is scary and so uncertain.

No art is developed by people staying within well-worn grooves. Great comedians know this, and they continually work on their craft and take chances for the sake of their art. They get up on stage and risk having a crowd hate their act, but they

know that trying new material and bombing is part of the process. They're constantly shifting and remolding their act, it's a dynamic process that can teach you how to learn to be in the moment. To act in the face of fear, and hopefully tell a few good jokes. Developing your sense of humor will bring you a long way with people because everyone loves to laugh, and if you're the person that makes them laugh often, they're going to want you around more.

Study Groups. These should be informal, localized, citizen-led, and trending towards improved social conditions for all. Study groups are a powerful tool in the hands of everyday people, if given the right tools of learning, and if the premise is believed that citizens can be responsible for uplifting society, as opposed to waiting for government institutions to do all the work for them.

THERE CAN BE NO LIBERTY
FOR A COMMUNITY WHICH
LACKS THE MEANS BY
WHICH TO DETECT LIES.

--WALTER LIPPMANN

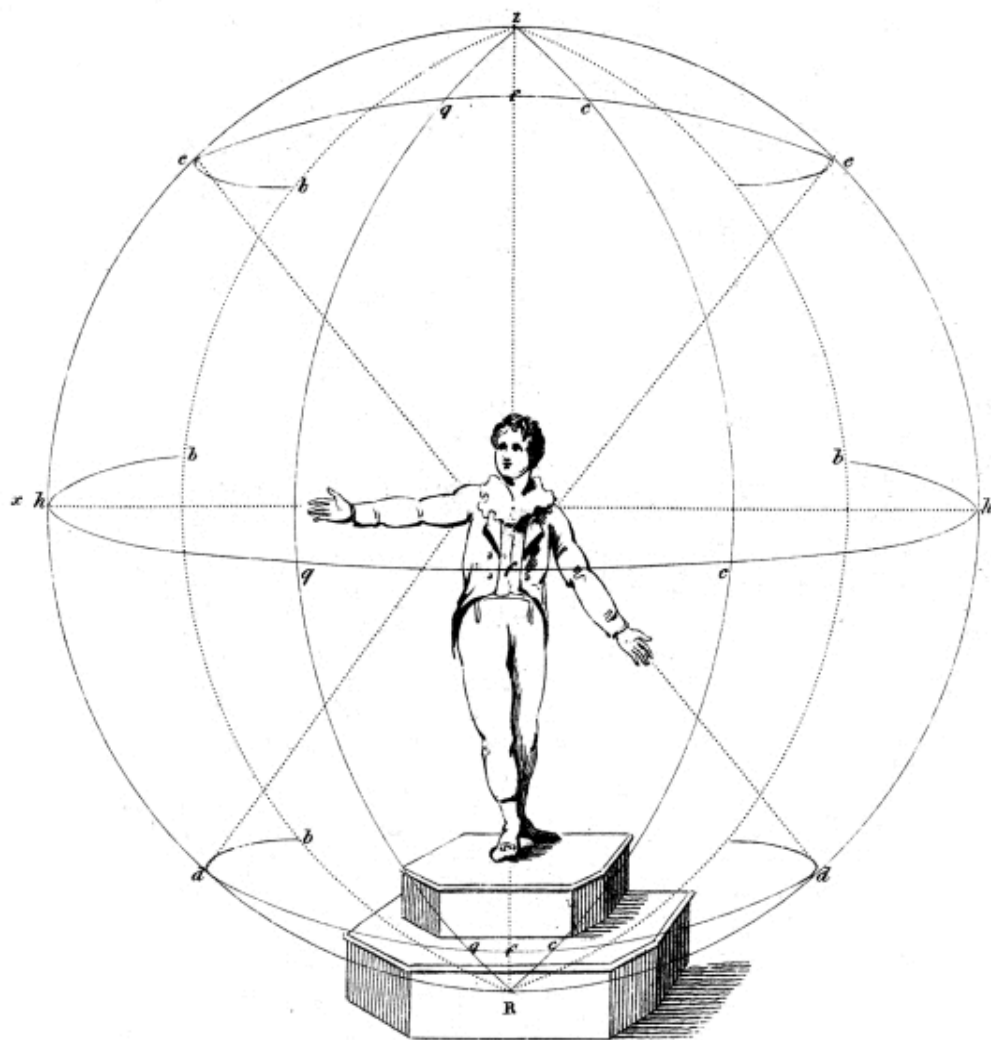
Let's imagine something. Groups of people gathering once a week to discuss things: issues of the day, valuable skills, media and political speech analysis, good books that enrich the mind and soul, historic periods and their relation to today, local township issues, open forums. . .so many uses can be envisioned with the use of study groups as a base. The more that people have the tools of learning, the better these types of groups can function.

Our society trends toward individuals becoming more disconnected from others in person, while seeming to connect more in the virtual environment. Nothing can replace face to face meetings. The concept of study groups may seem archaic to younger minds, but what we're going for is a more mature society. Not mature in the sense of a boring commitment to drudgery, but rather in the creative strive for a better world. A place where everyone is invited, and the boredom of post-industrial society is replaced by the vitality of conscious social construction. Young and old can learn together, and from each other. The elders can be invigorated by the youth's passion to change the world.

The youth can find that their high-pressure spirit is tempered by the experience and wisdom of the elders, and they can see how to turn their energy into results. Ideas into Execution. This is the way it's supposed to be, there isn't supposed to be such a division between age groups. Horace Mann be damned!

Civic Duties. The major distinction most of the people reading this essay will have is that they are considered citizens. This means, to put it simply, that we have some piece of the political power pie. We are not subject to a dictator, yet. As a people we have the opportunity to become a part of the government itself. It has been said, and wisely so, that with great power comes great responsibility. In public schools we are taught the *semblance* of civic knowledge. Here in Illinois we are even made to take a Constitution test, and that is the most advanced civic instruction we receive—and it still doesn't cover the subject adequately.

Most of us do not know what the basics of political life are, where the movers and shakers are, and how to engage effectively in that world. We are not taught in public schools how to run a political campaign, how the delegate process works, how to use Robert's Rules of Order, or even who our precinct chairs are. We don't know what gerrymandering is, or why term limits need to be set and revolving doors need to be closed. We are politically impotent. We are totally ignorant of the duties entrusted to us, and I think with the combination of study groups and the tools of learning, we can uplift the social and political environment directly, for the good of the People.



Part III: Emotional & Physical

IN THIS SECTION I INTRODUCE THE IDEA THAT THE INTELLECTUAL ARTS SHOULD NOT BE LEARNED AT THE EXPENSE OF THE EMOTIONAL CHARACTER AND PHYSICAL WELLBEING. WE LEARN AND THINK BEST WHEN OUR BODY IS VITAL AND OUR SPIRIT IS STRONG.

THE GOAL IS TO CONNECT OUR HEAD,
OUR HEART, AND OUR HANDS.

THE FIRST DEGREE

Working Tools. Let me make a diversion from the central course. My focus is on the Trivium, but I think it would be a great disservice to you to leave out considerations of emotional and physical development. In fact, I believe that intellectual development is stifled until the body and soul are healthy and strong. For the next few pages I want to make some remarks about this issue and give only some suggestions to you about what can be done. As with most of this essay, I'm putting these ideas out there for you, it's up to you to do your homework.

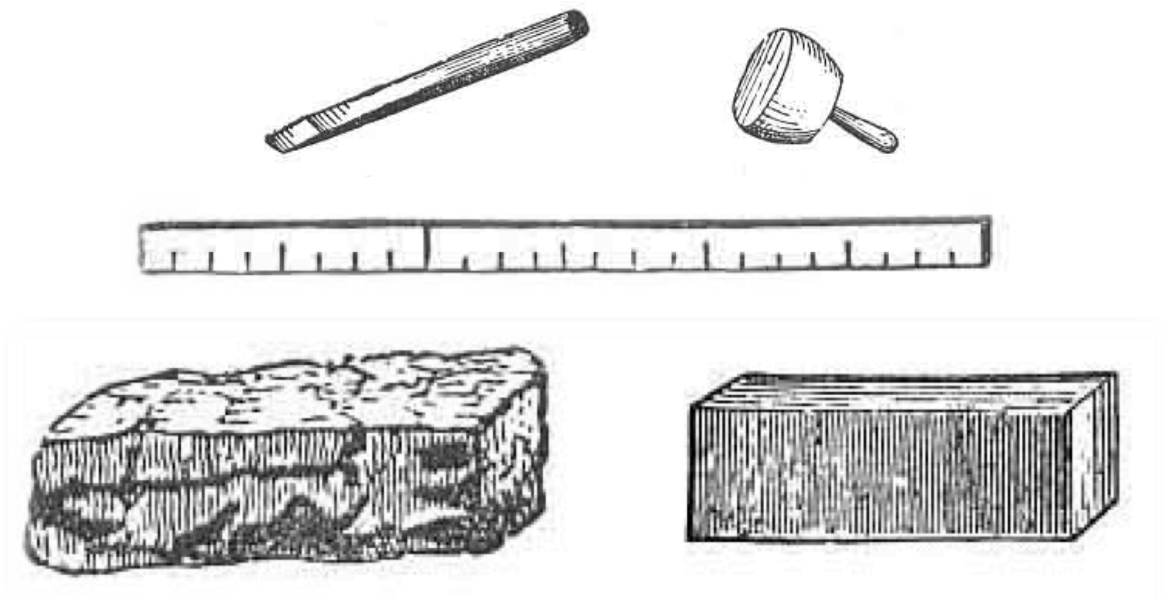
Earlier I mentioned that I wanted to come back to discussing the system that the Freemasons use, the one that puts the liberal arts in a certain context. To recap, they separate their learning into three "degrees," the first (Entered Apprentice) focusing on the **emotional self**, the second (Fellow Craft) focusing on the **intellectual self**, and the third (Master Mason) focusing on the **spiritual self**. What I like about this system is that they have the student work on their emotional character *before* learning the powerful intellectual arts. This seems like a better progression than to learn the intellectual arts *before* learning how to improve the qualities of character.

My intention is not to promote Freemasonry, but I do want to highlight my agreement that students should work on their emotions before, or alongside, their intellectual development. The powers of the mind are amazing. . . just look around at any city and realize it was constructed by people that used their *thoughts* to make the plans to build buildings, streets, canals, etc. We have a plethora of technology and capability, but a deficit of soul. Our educational departments want us to focus more on math and science, but less on the arts and humanities. As humans, we need both the Arts and Sciences to realize our full potential. It's with that in mind that this discussion about Masonic symbolism takes place.

Freemasons teach through ritual and lecture, and both are populated with symbolism, metaphor, and allegory. Symbols are focal points for attention, objects that can become like a living force within the soul/inner life. They are endless sources for contemplation and revelation. Through analogy they point us toward higher ideals about the Self, and meditating upon them opens up within us new angles of cognition and

understanding. While there are numerous symbols each Mason is required to learn about, I am only going to talk about four symbols from the first degree: the Rough Ashlar, the Gavel, the Chisel, and the 24-inch Gauge.

The Rough Ashlar is an uncut stone brought from the far-away quarry that must be cut into proper shape (the Perfect Ashlar) in order to be used to build the Temple. This represents the Apprentice that must work to improve himself before truly becoming a Master. In order to cut this ashlar to its proper form, the Apprentice uses three *working tools*. **The Gavel** represents energy and action. It's the masculine force that seeks to bring passion into a situation. The Gavel could become reckless and be used to cause great harm, and so it must be brought into focus. **The Chisel**, sometimes representing education, is the Feminine aspect that uses its discernment to guide the Gavel's energy in order to make proper cuts into the Ashlar—or proper changes in the Apprentice's life. The Chisel keeps the Gavel from swinging wildly and causing harm, giving it purpose. These working tools are balanced by **the 24-inch Gauge**, which represents the ability to know what angle to hold the Chisel at, and how much force should go into the swing in order to make perfect, right angle cuts. The Gauge also represents the twenty-four hours in a day, and so is a symbol for Time Management.



Self-esteem. One day I came across a book at the thrift store. It looked like a self-help book—not at all my favorite genre—but for some reason it caught my attention so I picked it up and skimmed it. The book, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem* by Nathaniel Branden, turned out to be a book that changed the way I thought about education, and life in general. Branden defines self-esteem as:

1. Confidence in our ability to think, confidence in our ability to cope with the basic challenges of life; and
2. Confidence in our right to be successful and happy, the feeling of being worthy, deserving, entitled to assert our needs and wants, achieve our values, and enjoy the fruits of our efforts.

Given that definition, self-esteem goes way beyond just simply feeling good about yourself, it's about making right decisions and leading a better life. *The Six Pillars* goes into more depth about the realities of self-esteem and how to build it in your own life, and I can't recommend it to you enough. Branden shows how high self-esteem makes you a better learner and a more effective person. In other words, you're not only going to be better at figuring things out, you're going to be better at making things happen. Getting things done. Moving and shaking!

Some of the traits that Branden says comes along with high self-esteem are rationality, realism, intuitiveness, creativity, independence, flexibility, ability to manage change, willingness to admit (and correct) mistakes, and finally, benevolence and cooperativeness. Add to all of that the critical thinking skills found in the Trivium and I can't think of a better set of qualities I would want to see in a student.

Conspiracy. Another book that I highly recommend to you that has many valuable tips for the Trivium student, is *The Straight-A Conspiracy* by Hunter Maats and Katie O'Brien. They teach learning tools that enable a teenager to get through high school with flying colors, and tackle the challenges of college like a pro. Among the many points they make, one of the most important is the idea that your emotions play a large part in how well you can learn. Self-limiting beliefs are the number one cause of poor learning ability. When you tell yourself that you can't figure math out, that you're just not good at math, that some people *are* good at math, and that you'll never figure out

how to do math. . .well, guess what? You won't. These limiting beliefs are the enemy of the Trivium student. We must eliminate them whenever we encounter them, in whatever form they take. If there's one point I've tried to make here in this essay it is that YOU CAN LEARN ANYTHING you want, and even if you don't know how you're going to do it, *here are some good tools for you to start with*. Grab that book, it's a good companion to this essay and they even have some methods that relate quite well to the Trivium Method.

Stress. I've already mentioned the book, *Brain Rules*, and one of the points made in that book is that the brain under the influence of stress chemicals does not perform very well at all. In fact, constant exposure to stress chemicals, or hormones, can cause damage to certain parts of the brain. If you find that you are overly stressed in your life, do some work on yourself before trying to engage your intellectual capacity. Take care of your soul so that you can handle the workload of uplifting your mind. By working on yourself, you should see an increase in calmness of the soul and mind, as well as more physical ease. The challenges of life become less harrowing for you and instead become a challenge that inspires you to work towards its resolution. Be well and take care of your soul before building up your mind.

THE BODY

The Feeling. Although this section is one of the shortest, it covers a most important topic. The health of the body has everything to do with the health of the mind and emotion. Not only does physical vitality reduce the amounts of stress hormones in the body, but it also releases the “good neurochemicals” that create states of happiness and elation. I can’t even begin to recommend to you a course of exercise or fitness because each person’s needs are so unique. I will say that it is better to do something to improve your physical vitality than to do nothing at all. Even if you just do some pushups in the morning and stretches at night, that’s better than television all day. Cardiovascular health has a great effect on the mind, as Medina points out in *Brain Rules*. Even ten to twenty minutes a day of good cardio can have an improving effect.

One thing I’d like point out, though, is the feeling you have in your body. Notice your body right now, does it feel tight? Is it relaxed? Does it feel sluggish, or exhausted? Do some parts of it feel “empty” and other parts “full?” Hopefully you’re feeling on top of your game, but the reality is that modern life is pretty taxing on our poor bodies. This lack of vitality in our bodies has an effect on the quality of our minds. Sluggish bodies do not breed witty minds. Negative mental habits can often create micro-tensions in the body, using up more oxygen than necessary and producing more stress hormones than desirable.

By improving the body we can improve the mind, but by improving the mind the body is rewarded, too. More organized thoughts give more room for clarity and peace of mind, and this means our bodies remain more calm and stress-free, even in the midst of chaos. Also, modern neuroscience shows that the brain creates more neural connections when you’re learning something physical. So if you couple the extra neural boost that physical learning gives you with the intellectual development of the Trivium stuff, you’re going to be rocking out. Say hello to a new brain. . .

Tai Chi. There are so many relaxation techniques and exercise regiments that I could recommend, but the only one I’m going to leave you with is the ancient practice, and martial art, called Tai Chi Quan. It’s roots trace back to ancient India and the bio-energetic practices employed by the Yogis. Many of these practices made their way into

China where it was mixed with many of the medical practices in existence then, much of which focused on “chi” or a quality of mind and body in which the mind was used to clear “blockages” in blood flow, as well as strengthen the tendons. There are many forms of Tai Chi but the one I recommend the most is the original, Chen style. The Chen style focuses the beginning student on exercises that build up internal energy, mind/body awareness, increased blood circulation, and strengthening of the lower half of the body while introducing very relaxed movements to the upper half. Imagine a great tree with firm roots digging straight into the ground while its limbs move lightly in the breeze. I’ve never experienced anything that focuses my mind and body so much as Tai Chi practice, and I can only hope that you can find a Chen style teacher in your area (Yang and Wu styles are also very good in their own way, though it is less intensive on the body and difficult to find a direct lineage teacher). To learn the practice of Standing Meditation (Zhan Zhuang, or, Standing Like Pole, a type of Chi Gung) is enough to introduce a great amount of vitality into your body and mind, but like anything physical it is best learned with a skilled teacher to guide you.



CLOSING REMARKS

Hopefully by now, if I've done my job well, you have a much clearer understanding of what the Trivium is and how to go about using it. As time goes on I'll be revising and updating this work, adding ideas where necessary and improving the language whenever possible. For now, you have in your hands the beginning of a new relationship to the practice of learning, and a distinct sense that education is completely obtainable outside of the classroom or lecture hall.

One thing to keep in mind is that this type of learning is a progression, not an installment. Like I mentioned earlier, these are skills and they need to be practiced over and over. I threw a lot out at you, but let me do you a favor and give you my Top 5 Trivium Skills. This is not an easy task because some of the skills you only use when necessary, like Defining Terms, while others are always running in the background, like Finding the Argument. Curiosity (More & Further) is the one that leads to all the rest, in my opinion, but that is way too vague. Given that, here is my list of the top five Trivium skills:

1. DECONSTRUCTION
2. THE PARAPHRASE
3. THE RHETORICAL TRIANGLE
4. FIND THE ARGUMENT
5. SPOTTING FALLACIES

If you practice just those five skills alone you will have gained quite a bit in your education. The Paraphrase? You can apply that one right away with those exercises I gave you. Paraphrase my essay in one sentence. Now try it in one paragraph.

Turn on the television and see how many times advertisers sell you something by saying either how many units they've sold or how many customers they've served (Appeal to Popularity), or how their product is the best because a doctor recommends it (Appeal to Authority). Then turn on a political show: how many times can you spot the Straw Man Fallacy, or Poisoning the Well, Guilt By Association, or the Slippery Slope?

If you don't know those fallacies yet spend ten minutes getting familiar and then look around.

Just work until these skills become mental habits, and the effects of Automaticity settle in and you don't have to consciously think about these skills so much, freeing up space for more advanced thinking. Use this essay as fodder for your analysis. Where did I use improper grammar? What assertions did I make with no foundation? Did I forget to tie up certain thoughts, or

leave questions wide open and dangling? What new words did you encounter? Did I use familiar words in ways you thought inappropriate or unnecessary? What points really intrigued you? *Have you been taking notes?*

Something that should be said before we finish here is how different this approach is to the

classical method of the Greek, Roman, and Middle Ages. It came up again in America in the 18th & 19th centuries. In those times, the Trivium was taught by reading from pre-selected texts. A professor expounded on many ideas and an emphasis was often on strict discipline in studies, and obedience to the teachers. Those students came out with a very regimented experience but you can't argue that they weren't brilliant. Just look at the requirements to get into Harvard around the time that it first opened its doors. Today's students wouldn't even know where to begin.

So, even though my approach is different, it's also meant to lead you to all of the other approaches to the liberal arts that have been promoted throughout the ages. Even modern authors like Mortimer Adler and Susan Wise-Bauer have much different takes on this old classic. When it comes down to it, the best practice comes from applying these methods to the reading of good books. Great books, even. The experience of conquering a difficult and very well written piece of literature bears tremendous rewards. To follow

IN THE CASE OF GOOD
BOOKS, THE POINT IS NOT
TO SEE HOW MANY OF
THEM YOU CAN GET
THROUGH, BUT RATHER
HOW MANY CAN GET
THROUGH TO YOU.

--MORTIMER J ADLER

through and reach a high level of understanding is to create amazing, well-organized, connections in the brain. It builds intellectual muscle. I won't be surprised to find out that studying the Trivium helps the brain to function better overall.

Some might notice that I've mentioned almost nothing at all about the Liberal Sciences, the Quadrivium of Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy. The reason for this is that the Trivium provides the Tools of Learning, the Quadrivium invites you to study the subjects that deal with the phenomena of Reality. First obtain the thinking skills of the Trivium, and then go on to further studies. But you shouldn't avoid the Quadrivium subjects, they are universally beneficial in all time periods. Some authors, usually the older ones, talk about Astronomy as the highest of man's abilities because it brings the mind into contact with the great Infinite Universe that surrounds us—the ultimate mystery and source of wonder. To look up into the night sky and have some knowledge about the movement of planetary bodies, and then further to understand the immense scales of distance that are at play when contemplating the cosmos. . . it leaves one breathless with wonder. True understanding of science should bring you to such ecstatic states.

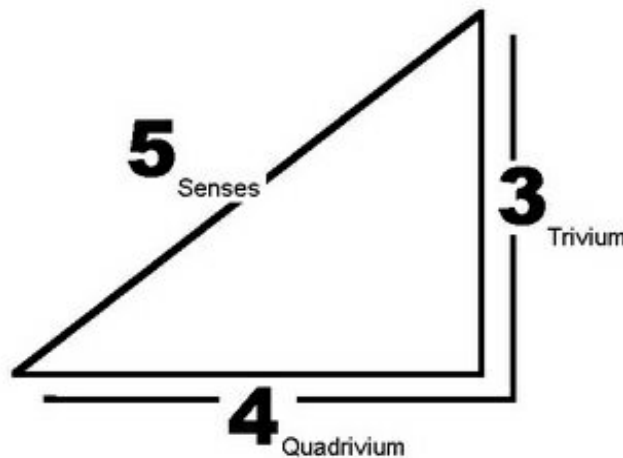
So now a big question is left at your feet: **what do you do with all of this knowledge?** Unfortunately, I cannot answer this question, it depends all upon who you are and what your goals are. If you do not know what your personal goals are then you should spend a few minutes, each day, thinking about them. Write them down. Make a plan of action and execute it. I've given some indications of what can be done with this knowledge but essentially I'm leaving that interpretation up to you. I would like to know that you've become a better reader, and a better listener because of this. I would like to know that you've begun to develop solid critical thinking skills and the no-fear attitude to apply them in everyday situations. I would definitely like to know that you've gained an appreciation for books and the pursuits of the intellect. And ultimately, I would like to know that the Trivium Method, the *Liberating Arts*, have enriched your life, giving you more appreciation for the incredible world around you.

534 & THE WINDING STAIRS

There's one more thing I want to leave you with. And yes, it comes from those mysterious Masons again. Some of their symbols are so rich with meaning for Trivium student, I can't leave it out.

In the Second Degree lecture, initiates are told about the Winding Staircase. Composed of sections with steps of specific number (3, 5 & 7), it describes to the initiate something of great importance, but what? The three steps seem to signify the three degrees of the Blue Lodge. Ok, that makes sense. The five steps signify the Five Senses. They also signify the "Five Orders of Architecture," five differently styled pillars, and is a lesson on noticing the differences in things that are similar (ponder on that one). Next we have the seven steps that signify—you guessed it—the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences.

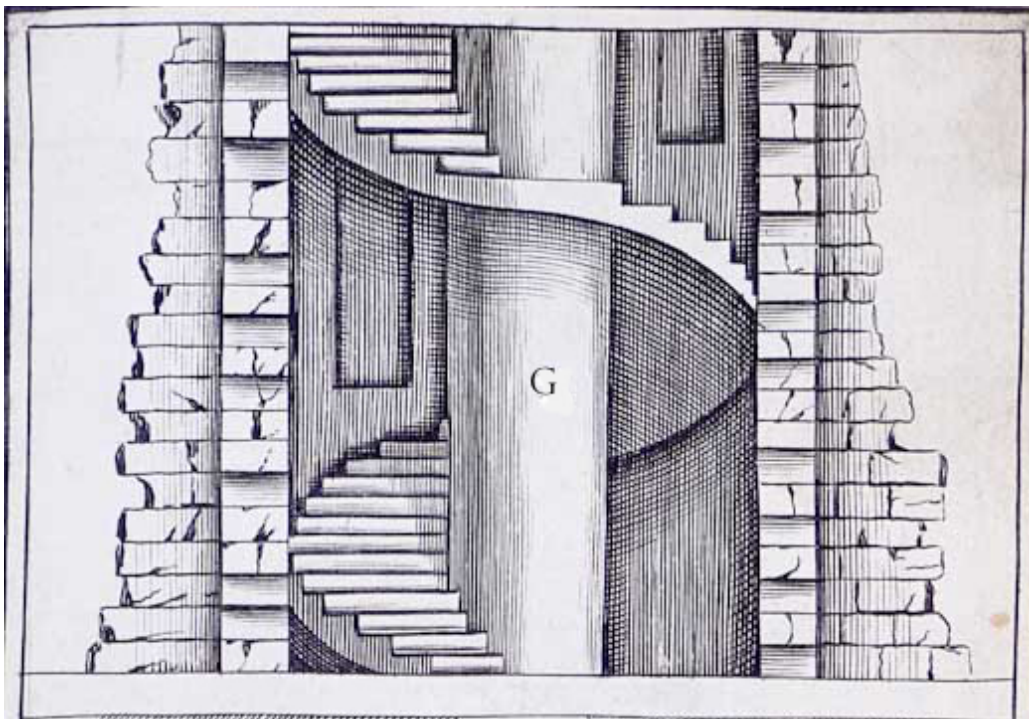
So starting from the Five Senses (5) you ascend first to the Trivium (3) and then the Quadrivium (4). $3+4=7$. Right there in the symbol you have



the concept built-in that you first take in data from reality via your Five Senses, and then you begin to make sense of that data and symbolize it (in language) via the three subjects of the Trivium, and then you study and further symbolize (in number) reality via the sciences of the Quadrivium. From there you ascend to the Middle Chamber, which is sometimes depicted as a scene of Nature. Reality. That which we know *is*. The difference between the initiate at the top of the stairs and the one at the bottom is that the one at the bottom only *perceives* Nature, while the one at the top has begun to truly *understand* it.

Then you have to consider the Winding Staircase alone. It's a symbol of ascension, and of courage. It symbolizes courage because as you ascend you cannot see

where you are going, where the path is leading you. You know that you're going up but the way is not clear. It takes a bit of faith to keep climbing. The next step is within sight but not many more than that, and the torches burn dimly—but at least they're there. You know you're ascending and getting to some greater point of Light, but you're not sure how much more you have to go. I would struggle to understand and study and for a while it didn't seem like much was happening, but then all of a sudden. . .Light. Things started clicking in my brain. Where there was once Chaos I now found the beginnings of Order. My journey in self-education is not finished by any means, but it's well under way. Hopefully you now have what you need to begin the same journey, I wish you the best in your travels!



THE WINDING STAIRCASE LEADS TO THE
MIDDLE CHAMBER, AND THE MIDDLE CHAMBER
LEADS TO NATURE